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AUTHOR	Webb, Michael
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ABSTRACT

Schools have introduced numerous programs and activities, intended to recognize the achievements of ethnic groups, in the belief that a multicultural education prepares students for life in an ethnically diverse society and also results in cognitive and affective benefits. Multicultural activities have the following goals: (1) to remedy ethnocentrism in the traditional curriculum; (2) to build understanding among racial and ethnic groups, and appreciation of different cultures; (3) to defuse interracial tensions and conflicts; and (4) to make the curriculum relevant to the experiences, cultural traditions, and historical contributions of minority groups. Studies also indicate links between multicultural education and improved academic achievement for African American and Hispanic American students. Most multicultural learning activities consist of discrete lessons organized around particular events. These activities may be confined to a particular classroom or can involve the entire school. Project Respecting Ethnic and Cultural Heritage (REACH) is a comprehensive, discipline-based multicultural program that infuses information on the history and culture of various groups into the middle school curriculum. Portland (Oregon) and Albuquerque (New Mexico) have also developed programs that integrate multicultural activities throughout the curriculum. The following considerations in developing interdisciplinary programs are outlined: (1) needs assessment; (2) goals; (3) curriculum development; and (4) staff development. A list of nine references and a list of four resources are appended. (FMW)

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MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Introduction

Schools have introduced numerous programs and activities to recognize achievements of a wide range of various ethnic groups in the beliefs that a multicultural education helps to prepare students for life in an ethnically diverse society and can bring about cognitive and affective benefits to students.

Goals

Generally, the introduction of multicultural activities has been motivated by at least four intentions: 1) to remedy ethnocentrism in the traditional curriculum; 2) to build understanding among racial and cultural groups and appreciation of different cultures; 3) to defuse intergroup tensions and conflicts; and 4) to satisfy make the curricula relevant to the experiences, cultural traditions, and historical contributions of the nation's diverse population.

Achievement Effects on Students

Many educators now assert that a growing body of evidence links multicultural education and improved academic learning. For example, Hale (1986) described cognitive gains achieved by children in a pre-school program integrating material on African American culture throughout the curriculum. Zaslavsky (1988) demonstrated how elements of African and other cultural traditions can be used to teach complex mathematics concepts to inner-city students. A study (Fulton-Scott, 1983) using three elementary programs for Hispanic children not English-proficient revealed that the math, reading, and language scores of students in bilingual and multiculturally-integrated English as a Second Language programs were significantly superior to scores of students enrolled in bilingual ESL without the multicultural integration.

Organization of Multicultural Programs

Most multicultural learning activities consist of discrete lessons organized around particular events, such as the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., Kwanza, Chinese New Year, Columbus Day, and so forth. These activities can be confined to a particular classroom, or can involve the entire school (for example, student assembly, school fair).

Hylton and Dumett (1986) present a list of suggestions for elementary level class activities focusing on multicultural themes:

- collect articles from newspapers and magazines that deal with one or more groups.
- collect relevant pictures, books, records, and poems.
- perform plays about various groups.
- keep a journal based on one or more themes, such as money around the world, or holidays around the world.
- develop a multicultural calendar.
- learn songs in different languages.
- make maps showing the origin of various groups.

An example of a more comprehensive multicultural program is *Project REACH* (Respecting Ethnic and Cultural Heritage), which has gained prominence as an academic discipline-based program for middle school social studies, and which now includes over 60,000 students and hundreds of teachers in twelve states. REACH infuses information on the history and culture of various groups into the regular curriculum. It is a multicultural curriculum and process, and teacher training process, managed on a school- or district-wide basis, organized around four phases:

- *Human Relations Skills*. Students participate in activities on self-awareness, self-esteem, interpersonal communication, and understanding group dynamics.
- *Cultural Self Awareness*. Students conduct research on their personal culture, family history, or community.
- *Multicultural Awareness*. Students study from booklets on American history from diverse ethnic points of view.
- *Cross Cultural Experience*. Historical and cultural information in the booklets is made personal through dialogue and exchange with students and adults from different ethnic groups (Howard, 1989).

According to Jones (1986), multicultural learning activities are most effective for learners when they:

- offer students opportunities to observe/participate in the affairs of the community.
- engage students directly and actively in learning.
- relate directly to the concerns of the students.
- rely on a broad range of instructional materials.
- offer a scope and sequence that is developmentally based.
- evaluate and document what has been learned using tests, demonstrations, surveys and other assessment methods.

The Portland Public Schools provides an example of a multicultural education program that has been implemented as a result of a community-wide mandate (Porter, 1986). The impetus for change came from the creation of a district desegregation plan, and a coalition of civic and church organizations stimulated public dialogue on the goals for multicultural education. Information was conveyed to the public in various forms such as publications, forums, and teach-ins.

Ultimately, a series of essays on cultural contributions of African Americans, Native Americans, Asians, and Hispanic

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Americans became the basis of the curriculum used throughout the district.

The Albuquerque Public Schools Elementary Social Studies Curriculum (Jones, 1986) offers activities referenced for each objective, resources available for students and teachers use, and suggestions for ways to integrate multicultural activities with other areas of the curriculum.

Considerations in Developing Interdisciplinary Programs

Needs Assessment. Decisions must be made regarding the grade(s) to be involved, the availability of materials and the development of others, hiring of new teachers, and training of current teachers.

Goals. Besides the district- or state-mandated student performance goals, goals for skills development and attitude change should be specified for each subject area and grade.

Curriculum Development. Most multicultural materials currently available are concentrated in the field of social studies. Two key issues to be addressed in the development of materials for other courses are the extent to which they reinforce student competency goals and the degree of their integration into the school's formal instructional program.

Multicultural materials have been developed by organizations and commercial publishers to support individual class lessons, as part of a course unit, to develop school-wide activities, or as the basis for an entire curriculum in one or more subject areas. Some of these materials can be identified by writing to the addresses below or with assistance from a librarian or other information specialist.

Staff Development. Barron (1989) and others (Jones, 1986; Washington Office of the State Superintendent, 1976) identify a set of considerations to overcome potential problems and obstacles.

- View multicultural education as a process, and as an integral part of the school.
- Specify outcomes; link goals for multicultural education to district or school goals for student learning.
- Center efforts around students, not teachers. Advisory committees should include parents and educators but should consist mostly of students. At the same time, respect the right of teachers to make professional choices for effectively meeting learning objectives.
- The role of program coordinator should be a paid position. If the program coordinator is responsible for other duties (teaching, guidance/counseling), he or she should be provided with release time.

In addition, successful programs require a commitment from leadership, which might consist of the department chair, school principal, or district superintendent. Plans for school- or district-wide multicultural education programs should be comprehensive, focused and well-publicized. Plans should also be long-term with measurable goals, staged timelines, resources and accountabilities. Burton (1985) examines the issue of student resistance to learning about other cultures and cautions consideration of two groups of students: those in the group the class is celebrating and who will be sensitive about the observance, and those not in the group who may not be interested and may be prejudiced against the celebrated group.

Conclusions

Increasingly, decisions regarding curriculum and instruction are being influenced by goals for including information about various social groups. State-wide commissions have been established in California, New York, Washington, and other states, as well as the District of Columbia, to examine state education guidelines and to recommend new guidelines for the inclusion of multicultural education objectives. Most states have adopted general goals affirming multicultural education and recognizing the value of ethnic and cultural diversity.

—Michael Webb

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Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. (1976). *A model for multicultural education in the basic skills: A curriculum infusion model for multicultural education student learning outcomes.* Olympia: Office for Equity Education. (ED 278 756)

Zaslavsky, C. (1988, July). *Integrating mathematics with the study of cultural traditions.* Paper presented to the 6th Annual International Conference on Mathematical Education, Budapest, Hungary. (ED 303 540)

Resources

Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History, 1407 14th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005

Office for Equity Education, Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Old Capitol Building, FG11, Olympia, WA 98504

Portland Public Schools, Department of Multicultural Education, Portland, OR 97207

REACH Center, 239 North McCleod, Arlington, WA 98223

ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, Institute for Urban and Minority Education, Box 40, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027, (212) 678-3433. Erwin Flaxman, Director. Wendy Schwartz, Managing Editor.

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